

RUPP (A.)

Concerning the Aims and Methods
of Hospital Alumni
Societies.

BY

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New York.

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CONCERNING THE AIMS AND METHODS OF HOSPITAL ALUMNI SOCIETIES.*

BY ADOLPH RUPP, M. D.,

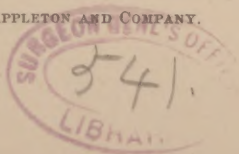
PRESIDENT OF THE CHARITY HOSPITAL ALUMNI SOCIETY, NEW YORK.

IF all were true that is said and applauded at the dinners of the different hospital alumni societies, then those who have a suspicion of the imperfection of human institutions would be treated to many manifestations of sentiment that might well puzzle and confound them, although they could fall back on the authority of so sturdy and common-sense a philosopher as Samuel Johnson, who says, "In all sublunary things there is something to be wished, which we must wish in vain."

At those dinners, as you all know, the hospitals are glorified, the hospital men praise themselves and are praised by others, and the alumni societies are lauded on account of the good they do.

Certainly none of us will say that all this buoyant exhilaration is without reasonable foundation. Considering the purity of feeling and the joyous swing of thought and

* Read at the March, 1895, meeting of the Society of the Alumni of Charity Hospital.



sentiment which prevail on these occasions, all seems well timed and placed.

Long may these annual and biennial reunions at the dinner table continue !

Other places, however, and other times justify and even invite the consideration and discussion of other thoughts and sentiments from other points of view. Then, too, where there is life, problems bearing on the aims and methods of such societies are always presenting themselves for consideration or reconsideration.

This being the last but one meeting of the season, I may be pardoned for bringing to your attention a few facts and fancies concerning our methods in the management of our society, and which I offer only in the way of suggestion. What I shall have to say may have occurred to many of you too. Indeed, some of these problems we have attempted to solve, and with more or less success. A few others have been dismissed by us after hasty and unsatisfactory discussion, as not sufficiently ripe for serious attention.

Article II of the Constitution of The Society of the Alumni of City (Charity) Hospital boldly and baldly tells us that "The object (aims) of this society shall be the advancement of medicine and surgery, and the promotion of social intercourse among its members."

No one will challenge the excellence of such aims, and none can be more consistent with self-respectful modesty. Moreover, these aims are permeated by the spirit of the old text, ever new with vigorous vitality, and therefore always true : "None of us liveth unto himself." Such are our ideals !

What are our methods by means of which we seek and hope to realize them ? We have three committees to help us to realize our ideals : (1) A committee to look after

the work, etc., which is to advance the science and art of medicine and surgery ; (2) a committee to take care of new members ; and (3) a committee to take care of all our social arrangements. Besides, we have the usual executive officers, a president and a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer.

But all this machinery amounts to only a little at best if the material it works for be inefficient, or lacks a sympathetic and enthusiastic co-operative spirit. Allow me to say a few words concerning the character and personnel of our regular meetings. Too often we see only the same faces and hear only the same voices ; and, although all is of first-rate quality, our meetings can not under such circumstances finally become anything else than monotonous. Look at our transactions and I think you will find this to be true.

The men who have shown most interest in our doings by attendance, by the reading of papers, and participation in discussions have been those who left the hospital between the years 1875 and 1885. This is not as it ought to be. The circle is too limited. Why do the men who left the hospital prior to 1875, and those who have left since 1885, manifest so little sympathy for the doings of this society ? Perhaps they do not know of our existence as they should. I would therefore suggest that the members of the committee on new members be asked to enlarge their sphere of usefulness. They might, besides passing on the credentials of candidates for membership, look around for candidates, old practitioners as well as the youngest graduates from the hospital. In doing this not altogether easy but pleasant work a number of ideas might suggest themselves to their business faculties which possibly would prove fruitful for the good name of our society and its better operation in realizing the ideals we have made our object.

Another suggestion that I would make refers to the awkward way in which our guests have often been treated. It might be well for our entertainment committee to retire with our guests when our executive sessions are to be of such a nature that absolute secrecy must be the order. We have no right to make our guests feel out of place. They should be made to feel that they are our friends and equals.

And what can the rank and file of the society do in the way of seconding the efforts of the science committee toward advancing the science and art of medicine and surgery, especially so in ways that will make our meetings worth the time of attending them? "Time," says Franklin, "is the stuff that life is made of"—and we medical men should be careful not to waste that which it is our function to rescue and prolong.

An alumnus of our hospital, my senior by about ten years, once asked me, "What does your society accomplish?" He also intimated that we could do him no good, that whatever time he might give to our society would be lost, and that his time was gaining in value as he was growing older. I could not reply to this argument, because the man, it seemed to me, was as uncomplimentary to himself as to us. He could not appreciate our ideals as we have striven to do, and yet we want and need just such men who know how to appreciate their time. If we can not teach them anything, they can teach us a good deal along many lines of medical science and art. And here excuse me for bringing in a few words on this head from Sir Thomas Browne: "There are infirmities not only of the body but of the soul and fortunes, which do require the merciful hand of our abilities. I can not condemn a man for ignorance, but behold him with as much pity as I do Lazarus. It is no greater charity to clothe his body than

apparel the nakedness of his soul. It is an honorable object to see the reasons of other men wear our liveries, and their borrowed understandings do homage to the bounty of ours."

We are practical men, and as such we have interests in common which reflect on us individually. We also have responsibilities to take care of; and we dare not shirk them if we would be live and earnest men and good citizens.

Along these lines our doings here can be a gain to ourselves, and indirectly beneficial to our professional *confrères* and the public at large.

A German professor and wit of the last century says: "People amuse themselves with uncertainties and call it discussion." There is as much truth in that hit to-day as there was one hundred years ago. But if we take care not to allow inane vanities to run away with our duties our discussions will contain something better than straw-stuffed amusement; and though our reportings, readings, and discussions may not send science forward with leaps and bounds, our doings, we may hope, will help us in keeping our senses open and "free from the mists of prejudice and the paralysis of cant." This free and open sense is on a level with originality and discovery, and only comes after them in importance.

Egyptian civilization shut out new ideas and facts to save its individuality, and died. Greek culture finally assumed a too ardent hastiness for the discussion of something new, forgetting what it had acquired and done in bygone centuries, and the glories of Greece crumbled into forgetfulness and a name, because the Greeks had shut their senses against what had at other times made them great among nations. Our culture individually is only dense and prejudiced if we chase after only what is new and shut our minds against the just claims of what is old. What is

true of Egypt and of Greece as great nations is psychologically true for each of us and all collectively. We must work both ways—at the new and at the old. Why were the beneficent virtues of ether left unapplied for centuries after its first discovery? (Discovered 1515 by Valerius Cordus—applied thoroughly and widely after 1845 by Morton, Jackson, and others.) Just because the general medical mind was not prepared to see and accept the powers within its reach.

On the other hand, can we not, even the youngest among us, recall new, loudly commended and recommended therapeutic measures which left many medical men and many lay people in very much the same disappointed plight in which the dog was after he lost his bone because he snapped at its exaggerated reflection in the water? Of course, all the other medical societies have these or similar aims—the advancement and diffusion of our particular branch of science, philosophy, and art. But they lack that bond of fellowship of service which is common to us and our hospital alumni societies, and which makes us a specialized group of men. We all enjoyed the rare opportunities of observation in a large hospital before beginning our careers as private practitioners. Some of us have drifted into the various specialties, some of us are physicians and others are surgeons, and only a few of us are general practitioners.

This being the case—by the judicious management of the science committee, seconded by the ready co-operation of all—we can each of us carry away more from these meetings which keep us in the swim of the great, full stream of medicine than we can from the meetings of any of the other societies, which all have special tendencies, and which are so often in their doings and tendencies like rivulets running away from the parent river.

Of course, the other societies have other uses and interests for us all which after a manner bring us in touch with the profession at large.

With one more reminder, coupled with a suggestion, I shall end my speech. By vote, at last month's meeting, the officers and standing committees are its executive committee. The powers conferred are great and may easily be abused. But the powers conferred as they are, properly and fairly worked, will facilitate and expedite all our routine business, and besides heighten and lengthen the social part of our gatherings.

The specific characteristic of the government of our society is "committee government." The offices of president and vice-president are simply and purely honorary. Our president only presides at our meetings—all the rest that he presumes to do he does by the courtesy of the committees and your acquiescence and kindness.

I would therefore suggest, on account of all this, and for the better orientation of all of us, that the names of all officers and the names of all the men serving on the various committees be printed on the reverse side of all the notice cards.

I thank you for your courteous attention and hope that we may all meet again next November.

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FRANK P. FOSTER, M.D.

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